

National Education Policy 2020 and Social Justice

Dr. Ratan Sarkar^{1*}

ABSTRACT

The National Policy of Education from 1986 has been replaced by the Government of India's National Education Policy 2020, the first in 34 years. The Indian Education System underwent numerous adjustments as a result of the new strategy. To develop a new system that is in line with the aspirational goals of 21st century education, the NEP proposes reform and revamping of the educational structure, including its rules and regulations and governance. While concentrating on numerous aspects of education, the strategy also aims to close the technology-education divide. The commitment to achieve social justice by lowering disparities and inequities in education at all levels and so forming a socially justified society and nation as a whole is one of the major features of NEP 2020. Additionally, the NEP 2020 seeks to close a number of deficiencies in India's educational system. It is anticipated that under this policy, India would be able to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal by delivering inclusive and equitable quality education. This paper elaborates on NEP 2020 and its efforts to promote social fairness.

Keywords: *NEP 2020, Social Justice, Constitutional and Social Justice Ideals*

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was introduced to revamp the Indian education system to align it with the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. It was formulated to address various shortcomings and provide a more holistic and forward-looking approach to education. The policy was developed over a period of time through consultations, committee reports, and public feedback. The process of formulating NEP 2020 began with the formation of a committee headed by Dr. K. Kasturirangan, a former Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). The committee conducted widespread consultations with stakeholders including educators, students, parents, and experts across various fields (Pandey, 2021). These consultations gathered inputs and feedback on different aspects of

¹Head, Department of Education & Assistant Professor of Education, Department of Teachers' Training (B.Ed.), Prabhat Kumar College, Contai (Affiliated to Vidyasagar University) Karkuli, Contai, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal-721404 (India)

*[Corresponding Author](#)

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education. Based on the inputs received, the committee drafted the new education policy. The draft was presented to the public for further feedback and suggestions. After considering the feedback and making necessary revisions, the final draft of NEP 2020 was prepared and presented to the Union Cabinet. The cabinet approved the policy in July 2020 (Ananya, 2023).

Key Objectives of NEP 2020:

- The NEP 2020 aims to achieve various objectives, including:
- Providing universal access to quality education.
- Ensuring equity and inclusion in education.
- Promoting multidisciplinary education and flexibility in curriculum.
- Focusing on foundational literacy and numeracy.
- Encouraging research and innovation in education.
- Emphasizing vocational education and skill development.
- Enhancing the use of technology in education.
- Restructuring higher education to meet global standards.
- Strengthening teacher education and training.

Overall, the New Education Policy 2020 represents a significant step forward in the evolution of India's education system, with a focus on holistic development, innovation, and adaptability to the changing needs of society.

NEP 2020 towards Social Justice

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is an education policy introduced by the Government of India to overhaul the education system in the country. It aims to bring about significant reforms in all levels of education, from school to higher education, and is designed to address the changing needs of the 21st century while promoting holistic development, creativity, and critical thinking among students. The new policy aims for public investment and aims to reach 6% of the GDP in educational sector from the existing 4.5%. The policy aims to achieve 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio in school education by 2030 by bridging social gaps in access, participation and learning outcomes in school education (Singh, 2020). The NEP 2020 places a strong emphasis on social justice as a fundamental principle guiding its reforms in the education sector. The policy recognizes that access to quality education is essential to promoting social equity, inclusivity, and empowerment. The NEP 2020 emphasizes the promotion of social justice as one of its core principles (Kem, 2020). It aims to create a more equitable and inclusive education system that addresses historical and systemic inequalities while providing equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their background, socio-economic status, caste, gender, or physical abilities (Kem, 2020). Several aspects of the NEP 2020 demonstrate its commitment to addressing social justice issues:

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- **Equity and Inclusion:** The NEP aims to ensure that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, gender, caste, or disability, have access to education. It stresses the importance of providing equal opportunities and eliminating barriers that hinder the participation of marginalized and disadvantaged groups. To add more, it can be put in record that the new NEP focused on achieving equity and inclusion. In the context of higher education or schooling, inclusion entails reorganizing the entire system with the goal of assuring a wide array of educational options, including curriculum, pedagogy, recreational opportunities, etc. The goal of the policy is to prevent the segregation and isolation of racial and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and people who experience language-related learning challenges and run the risk of being left out of educational opportunities (Soni, 2023). By using language to make sense of the world, we can establish and destroy power, authority, and legitimacy. The objective of NEP 2020 is for all people to be competent in many languages at various educational levels.
- **Holistic Development:** The policy focuses on holistic development, which includes not only academic skills but also critical thinking, problem-solving, and life skills. This approach is designed to empower students from all backgrounds to become well-rounded individuals who can contribute meaningfully to society.
- **Multilingualism:** The NEP encourages the use of the mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction, particularly in the early years of schooling. This approach helps bridge linguistic barriers and ensures that children from diverse linguistic backgrounds have equal access to education (Gong & Wen, 2023).
- **Reducing Disparities:** The restructuring of the school system into a 5+3+3+4 structure under the NEP aims to provide a strong foundation for all students. This approach helps reduce early dropouts and ensures that students receive a consistent and quality education, irrespective of their background.
- **Vocational Education:** The policy's emphasis on vocational education and skill development is aimed at addressing the economic disparities that often lead to limited opportunities for certain groups. By integrating vocational education into the curriculum, the NEP seeks to enhance employability and provide alternative pathways for students who may not pursue traditional higher education.
- **Teacher Training and Quality:** The NEP acknowledges the importance of well-trained and motivated teachers in promoting social justice. The focus on continuous professional development and periodic evaluations is intended to improve the quality of teaching and ensure that every student receives equitable and high-quality education.
- **Reservation and Affirmative Action:** The NEP recognizes the need for continued support of affirmative action policies, such as reservations, to ensure that historically marginalized and underrepresented groups have fair access to higher education and other opportunities.

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- **Technology and Access:** The integration of technology in education, as proposed by the NEP, can help bridge the digital divide by making educational resources more accessible to students in remote and underserved areas.
- **Flexibility in Education:** The NEP's approach to multidisciplinary education and multiple exit options in higher education aims to accommodate a wide range of interests and abilities, promoting greater equity and access to higher learning.
- **Equitable Access:** The policy emphasizes providing equitable access to education for all segments of society. It aims to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas, and ensure that education is accessible to marginalized and underserved communities (Kem, 2020).
- **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy:** The NEP 2020 places a strong emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy skills. This focus on basic education ensures that all students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are equipped with essential skills that form the basis for further learning (Gong & Wen, 2023).
- **Mother Tongue-Based Education:** The policy recommends that children be taught in their mother tongue or local language until at least Grade 5. This approach respects linguistic diversity and provides a more inclusive learning environment, especially for marginalized communities (Gong & Wen, 2023).
- **Special Education and Early Intervention:** The policy highlights the need for early identification and intervention for children with special needs. It emphasizes the importance of providing appropriate support and resources for their holistic development.
- **Vocational Education and Skills:** The NEP recognizes the importance of vocational education in promoting social justice. By integrating vocational skills into the curriculum, students from diverse backgrounds can acquire practical skills that enhance employability and reduce socio-economic disparities.
- **Multidisciplinary and Holistic Learning:** The policy promotes a multidisciplinary approach to education, which can help break down traditional hierarchies between different fields of study. This approach allows students to pursue their interests and talents, regardless of societal norms or biases.
- **Gender Equality:** NEP 2020 underscores the need for gender-sensitive education. It aims to eliminate gender disparities and biases in education by providing equal opportunities and a safe and supportive environment for all students.
- **Socio-Economic Equity:** The policy seeks to address the digital divide by providing access to technology and online resources for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring that they are not left behind due to lack of access.
- **Inclusion of Community Participation:** In an effort to reduce the exclusion of pupils on the basis of language and disability, conscious understanding of roles and responsibilities as well as community engagement have been developed. This would encourage students to understand more about India's rich cultural diversity, its educational system, and its traditions. It will also make them more aware of human values such as empathy,

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tolerance, and respect for others' viewpoints. Above all, NEP 2020 has placed a strong emphasis on fostering or reviving creative human activity, which is essential for the 21st-century educational system.

NEP 2020 and Constitutional, Social Justice Ideals: A Contradiction

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has been subject to a range of opinions and critiques, and some individuals and groups have expressed concerns about potential contradictions with constitutional and social justice ideals. While the NEP 2020 aims to bring about transformative changes in the education system, it's important to acknowledge that interpretations and evaluations can vary. Some critics argue that the emphasis on teaching in the mother tongue or regional language up to Grade 5 might undermine the linguistic diversity of India and could potentially restrict access to knowledge for those who do not speak the regional language. Some critics have expressed concerns about the potential impact of the NEP on reservations and affirmative action policies (Saluja, 2022). There are apprehensions that the proposed reforms might impact the social equity goals that have been central to Indian policies. While the emphasis on vocational education is seen as important for skill development, some critics worry that it might reinforce existing social and economic disparities if not implemented carefully and equitably. Moreover, critics have also noted that the policy's emphasis on autonomy and self-regulation of institutions could potentially lead to the dominance of private educational institutions, potentially excluding marginalized communities due to financial constraints. While technology integration is a key feature of the NEP, concerns have been raised about the digital divide that exists in India. Relying heavily on technology could disadvantage students without access to necessary resources (Saluja, 2022). Furthermore, critics worry that the policy's focus on a single national assessment framework and standardized tests might overlook the diverse learning styles, languages, and cultural backgrounds of students.

It's important to note that the interpretation of policies can be complex and multifaceted, and differing viewpoints are common when it comes to major policy changes. The government and policymakers have responded to some of these concerns by clarifying certain aspects and emphasizing the inclusive and flexible nature of the NEP's implementation. Public discourse, stakeholder engagement, and ongoing feedback are crucial for refining and shaping policies to align more closely with constitutional values and social justice ideals. It's recommended that individuals and groups engage in constructive dialogue, engage with policy documents, and provide feedback to ensure that policy implementations are balanced and equitable.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be stated that, the New Education Policy 2020 envisions an education system that is not only academically rigorous but also socially just and inclusive. It seeks to create an environment where every individual, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to realize their full potential and contribute positively to society. Further, NEP 2020 is designed to

promote social justice by addressing disparities and ensuring that education is accessible, inclusive, and equitable for all students. By implementing its recommendations, India's education system aims to create a more just and equal society where education serves as a tool for empowerment and upliftment.

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Conflict of Interest

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